

The Future Salvation

by John Murray

The sermon emphasizes the importance of knowing the time and being awake to the appointed season, which is the coming of Christ, and the significance of the salvation that will be completed at that time.

Duration: 43:47

Scripture: Psalm 4:8, Romans 13:8-9, Romans 13:11-14

Topics: "Salvation"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the exhortation given by the apostle Paul to awake out of sleep. He emphasizes that the salvation of the people of God is the hope and ultimate goal. The preacher highlights the importance of being awake and alert to the events and times we are living in, as the last days will lead to the consummation of all of history. He emphasizes that it is inconsistent and incompatible with our faith to be indifferent or asleep to the events happening around us. The sermon concludes with the reminder that the night is far spent, urging believers to be vigilant and prepared for the coming judgment.

Transcript

The epistle to the Romans, chapter thirteen, at verse eleven. Romans, the thirteenth chapter, at verse eleven. And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

Sleep is a great blessing, for it is God's provision for rest and recuperation after we have expended our energies. And oftentimes it is God's provision for the regaining of health when we are ill. You remember the disciples said to Jesus with reference to Lazarus, if he sleep he shall do well.

The ability to sleep well is the sign of health and contentment. And oftentimes restlessness, when we should be asleep, I don't say always, but oftentimes restlessness is due to a lack of trust in God, a lack of that Godliness with contentment, which is great gain. And that is why the psalmist said, I will both lay me down in peace and sleep, for thou only makest me to dwell in safety.

But any good thing out of place is an evil. To be asleep, for example, when our house is on fire, may end in tragedy. And to be asleep when we ought to be at work is sloth.

And to be asleep when we ought to be engaged in prayer and worship is godlessness. That is why the wise man said, love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty. And drowsiness shall close a man with flags.

Go to the aunt thou sluggard, consider her ways, and be wise. There is also, of course, the sleep of moral and spiritual apathy. The sleep of spiritual sloth.

And that is the kind of sleep that is referred to in our text. And that knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep. It is the sleep of spiritual indolence, of spiritual indifference.

You will notice that Paul is here speaking not to unbelievers, but to believers. For only to such could he say that now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. He reckons them with himself as being believers, and he is speaking about some kind of salvation that is nearer than when they believed.

And this is to remind us that even believers need oftentimes to be aroused from spiritual indolence, from carelessness, from indifference, from listlessness. Now what is the particular reason that the Apostle presses home in this particular text for the arousing of believers from their spiritual sleepiness or slothfulness? That is the particular consideration that is before us in this text. The reason why the Apostle urges upon his fellow believers that it is high time to awake out of sleep.

Now it can be very simply stated that the particular reason that the Apostle urges in this text is the calendar. It's well to look at the calendar, isn't it? That's exactly, in essence, what the Apostle Paul is urging in this text. The calendar.

That is the calendar of events, and the passage of time. Time has meaning, and that is why it is so ungodly to be asleep when we should be awake. That is why it is wrong to be asleep when we should be in prayer, and wrong to sleep when we should be at work.

Time is precious. There is a time for everything. There is indeed a time to sleep, and it is a great blessing, and we all know that very well.

But there is a time to be awake, and it is just because time has significance that sleepiness out of place is something that contradicts our Christian profession, our Christian faith. And it is a particular aspect of time that the Apostle Paul has in view in this particular text, because he's saying, and that knowing the time, and that is the appointed time. What the Apostle Paul is reminding his readers of in this particular text is that time is running out.

That the whole expanse of time is moving to an appointed season. Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep. And then he specifies what he has in mind.

For now is our salvation nearer than when we believe. Now what is the salvation that the Apostle has in mind in this text? When he says, now is our salvation nearer than when we believe. Well, if you look at the Expositor, you will find various views expressed, but according to the teaching of the New Testament, I don't think there is any other alternative but this.

That the Apostle Paul is here referring to salvation that would be completed at the coming of Christ, at the glory of Christ's appearing. The word salvation is used quite frequently in the New Testament in that sense. Of course it is used with reference to the salvation that believers have in their possession here and now.

And that salvation could not be spoken of as nearer than when they believe, because it is a salvation that is in the actual possession when we believe. That is the salvation the Apostle Paul has in mind earlier in this epistle when he says, I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. And again a little later on in this same epistle he says, with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

And therefore he is thinking of the salvation that comes into a person's possession by faith. And it's not something that is future, it is something that is in possession here and now. But the word salvation is quite often used in Paul and in other places in the New Testament in the sense of the future salvation.

That is the salvation when it would be completed, consummated at the coming of Christ. The word redemption is used often times in that sense also. Redemption is used with reference to what is completed in the finished work of Christ.

It is used with reference to the redemption that the people of God enjoy here and now, but it is also used with reference to the redemption that will be completed, that will be consummated and perfected at the coming of Christ. And Jesus used the word redemption in that sense when he said to his disciples with respect to his second coming, be ye not afraid, lift up your hearts, because your redemption draws now. And it is in that sense that the apostle uses the word redemption earlier in this epistle when he says that we are waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

Likewise the word salvation is quite often used in the New Testament in that sense. And of course it is very important to recognize the unity that there is between the salvation now in possession and the salvation that will be completed and perfected at the coming of Christ. There is a unity and there is a continuity, but we must remember that it is at the coming of Christ that that salvation will be perfected.

And so when Paul says for example in the epistle to the Philippians, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Paul is not talking about the salvation that believers have now in their possession by faith, because that salvation is not worked out. It's a gift of grace, and there's no working of ours in connection with it.

He's thinking of the salvation that would be completed. And it is that salvation that he enjoins believers to work out, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Or again, when the apostle says in the first epistle to the Thessalonians, God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The context will clearly may indicate that he is referring to salvation as completed. He has not appointed us to the judgment of God, but to the salvation that will be perfected and completed at the coming of Christ. Do you also remember that in the epistle to the Hebrews, when the writer is referring to the angels, he says, are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation? Heirs of salvation.

And you can't speak of heirship except with reference to something in the future. They're heirs of salvation. They're not heirs of the salvation they have now in possession, because it is in possession.

But they are heirs of the salvation that is yet to be revealed. That is what is in view when it is said that the angels are ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation. And again, in the same epistle, epistle to the Hebrews, in the ninth chapter, you remember that he says Christ was once

manifested to bear the sins of many, and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

And you see, that clearly indicates that it is the salvation that will be manifested when Christ will come. He will be manifested the second time without sin unto salvation. That is, unto the complete, perfect salvation for the people of God that will be bestowed upon them when Christ will come again the second.

And the apostle Peter likewise uses this word salvation in that very same sense when he says of believers that they are kept by the power of God through faith unto the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the last time. The salvation ready to be revealed. And it is unto that terminus, unto that goal, that they are being kept by the power of God through faith.

Now it is that salvation, therefore, that Paul must have in view in this text. When he says now we have salvation nearer than when we believe. He is thinking of that great event in the future when the salvation of the people of God will be completed.

And it is that salvation that is nearer than when we believe. Now there are certain lessons which we must divide from this statement of the apostle. Lessons relevant to the particular exhortation that he gives in this, the earlier part of this version, that knowing the time, the season, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep.

And the first lesson that we must divide from this teaching of the apostle as from various other teachings of the New Testament is that it is that salvation that is the hope of the people of God. Now here we are touching on something which I feel needs a great deal of emphasis, and is oftentimes sadly overlooked. And when it is overlooked, it reflects very seriously upon the vitality and the genuineness and the liveliness of our faith.

It is this salvation that is the hope of the people of God. It is not death that is the hope of the people of God. Death after all is an enemy.

It is perfectly true that at death believers are made perfect in holiness as respects their spirits, and they are translated into the very presence of Christ. So that Paul could say to depart and to be with Christ is far better. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

Death should not be something to fill the people of God with terror. It's perfectly true that death for a believer is a blessed event. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.

But after all, death is not the great hope of the believer at all. And we have a serious deflection from the Christian hope, and therefore from the Christian hope, when we are thinking of death as the great hope of the church. It is for that that they are groaning, that they are waiting, because the whole expectation of a true believer is gravitate when Christ will come again the second time without sin unto salvation.

That is the expectation. That is the goal of the believer. And if a believer does not have this as his goal, it is because there has been in his case, or her case, a deflection from the teaching of the gospel, the teaching of the New Testament.

You notice that, for example, in this very epistle earlier, where the apostle says with respect to the creation that it groans. And not only so, but we ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. That's the

resurrection hope.

When he speaks there of the adoption, the resurrection, the redemption of the body, he is thinking of that glorious consummation that will be realized when Christ will come again the second time without sin unto salvation. And you find that very same type of expectation reflected in the apostle, in the second epistle to the Corinthians, when he says in the fifth chapter, we know that in the earthly house of this tabernacle where it is all, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house, which is from heaven.

If so be that being clothed, we shall not be found naked. And the clothing that the apostle has in view there is, of course, the clothing with the resurrection. That's what he groans for.

Not that we would be unclothed. He has no particular desire in itself to die. Not that we would be unclothed, but clothed with time, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

And the mortality is that same immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on immortality, incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to death, is swallowed up in victory. And again in the epistle to the Philippians, you remember, he says, our citizenship is in heaven.

From whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile bodies, that it may be fashioned like us, and clothed as follows, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself. And it is that that the apostle calls in his epistle to Titus, the blessed hope. Looking for the blessed hope, and the appearing of the glory of the great God, and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

That's the hope, the expectation of a true believer. And there's something radically wrong with our faith. There's something radically wrong with our hope.

If we do not gravitate in expectation, in expectancy, in hope towards that great event, when Christ will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of... Now having established that very clearly from the teaching of the New Testament, the next aspect of this particular text that we need to take into account is that Paul says, now is this event, this salvation nearer than it's nearer. Now there's something there that we have to take very seriously into account. And you're perhaps not aware of the currents of thought that are abroad in the world at this present time, that are really in direct contradiction.

But in order to state it positively, it is just this, that there is a day in the calendar when it will arrive. That's what Paul is saying, it's nearer than when we believe. If you are thinking, for example, of an event which is going to occur in the year 1970, let us say on the 25th of December 1970, well, you say it's nearer than it was a year ago.

And that's just because there is the lapse of time that makes the future lapse. And when he therefore says, here now is our salvation nearer than when we believe, he is talking about the calendar of events. And it is to this effect that there is a day in the calendar of events when this event will occur.

And since it is a day in the calendar of events, it is nearer than it was a year ago. It is nearer than it was two years ago, or twenty years ago, or a thousand years ago. And there's tremendous significance in that fact that there is a day coming in the calendar of events when this salvation will be realized.

When Christ will come down from heaven in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. And that means that history is moving to Eternus, that what we know as time is moving to its end, and it's rapidly moving to its end. Now no one knows the day or the hour.

Jesus himself said, with reference to that in the days of his flesh, of that day and hour knows no man, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only. That is to say, he was expressing himself as regards his human knowledge in terms of the ignorance of that day. It was not given to him in his human nature, in his human knowledge, to know when that day would occur.

We don't need to suppose that he is thinking of it now, even in his human nature, but in any case, no man knows. And let not even the angels of heaven know when this day is to occur. But Paul is here reminding believers that as far as their life span is concerned, or was concerned, it was nearer than when they believed.

And that is what is true also of us. We know not how far distant this great event may be, but it's going to come someday in the calendar of events. There will be calendars in that day.

And there will be the first of January to the thirty-first of December. In that particular time, things will be going on, as Jesus himself called us, marrying and giving in marriage. And they will not let it go until the flood came and took them all away.

So shall be the coming of the Son of Man. And we must remember that. That events will be going on according to the regular routine of this world's history, until then suddenly, in a moment, when no man knows, he will come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

The day of the Lord will come as a thief, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great glory, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. The earth and the works that are in it shall be burned up. And it's going to come suddenly indeed, but it's going to come in the calendar of events.

Now for all we know it may be a thousand years distant or two thousand years distant, God has not revealed it to us. But it still can be said with reference to each believer, now is that salvation nearer than when he... And there is significance to that fact. Because what transpires between death and resurrection is not reckoned in the calendar of time.

It doesn't enter into this reckoning. All that remains for us is what remains of our earthly pilgrimage. And that is why it is of significance to say it is nearer than when we believe.

The scripture makes it very clear claim, that as far as the history of this world is concerned, this world where you have the calendar of events, there is no significance to what will transpire between death and... There is great significance for the believer himself indeed, during that period that intervenes between death and resurrection. But as far as the calendar of events in this world is concerned, it is not reckoned. Yet God has appointed that it may once... And that period that intervenes is not reckoned in terms of time.

However long it may be in terms of our calendar, it's not reckoned in terms of time. And just as we may say, now is our death nearer than when we believe. So it can rightly be said with equal significance, now is this salvation nearer than when we believed.

Now that is what the apostle is urging here as the reason why it is high time to awake out of sleep. That is the appointed season that we are to know. And that, he says, knowing the time, that is knowing the appointed season.

And it is that appointed time in God's ordination, in God's plan, that we are to know. Now you see, there is a definite connection, therefore, between what proceeds in this passage and what succeeds in this passage in relation to that necessity of awaking out of sleep. When Paul says here, and that, and that... Note that word that in your English text.

And that, he is pointing back to what goes before. And he is saying, in effect, that all the more so, is this necessary. Since you know the time, since you know the appointed season, since you are aware that this salvation on the part of God is appointed in His determinate purpose.

And what is that, that proceeds? Well, it is just that which you have from the eighth verse on. O no man anything but to love one another, for he that loveth another hath put... Thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet. And if there be any other commandment this briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

Love worketh no ill to his neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. And it is all that that the Apostle Paul has in mind when he says in this verse, and that. And all the more so must you take heed to these injunctions, to these exhortations of the preceding verses, since you know the appointed time.

And then you have the succeeding in very close relationship to that, the night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, that is, not in excess and drunkenness, not in chambering, that is, not in sexual excesses and wantonness, that is, not in debauchery, not in strife and gambling, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof.

So you see that the whole preceding context in this passage, and the whole succeeding context, and all the exhortations that are involved in these verses, from verse eight to the end of the chapter, are bound up with what he says in this particular verse, that now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. And it shows us the significance for practical living in this world, for practical Godliness, is the great truth, respecting the consummation of the kingdom of God, and the consummation of the whole time process. Time is moving rapidly on.

The night is past, hence the day is at hand. And it is for that reason, in this particular context, that it is all the more necessary that we should awake out of our spiritual sloth and attend to those things which are the marks and the injunctions and the criteria of Christian faith and of our Christian hope. We are drawing near the close of another year, and it is well for us to take the lessons that accrue to us from the passage of time.

Time is not ending. Time is moving to its consummation. The night is already forespent.

That is to say, the whole temporal order is already forespent. The ages that are past have run their course, and we are in what the New Testament calls the last days. That is to say, the last days that will have their termination in nothing less than the consummation of the whole of history, the consummation of the whole

time process.

And is it reasonable? Is it compatible with our Christian faith that we should be asleep, that we should be, as it were, indifferent to the events that are transpiring? When a person is asleep, of course he is not alive to his environment. He is not alive to what is going on. Is it compatible with reason? Is it compatible with our faith? Is it compatible with our hope that we should be, as it were, indifferent and listless? Time is.

Oh, my friends, we are here, ushered into the presence of eternal reality. Now is this salvation. And when we believe it, and it is well for us to take heed, that we should now realize the necessity of casting off the works of darkness and putting on the armor of light, that we may show our affinity with that salvation, which will be manifested in its completeness when Christ will come in his own glory and in the glory of the Father with the holy angels.

We are living in days, my friends, in which the vices that the Apostle Paul condemns in this passage are particularly manifest in the world, and it is sad to say particularly manifest in many instances even within the Church of God. The works of darkness, chamberings, sexual excesses, debauchery, drunkenness, the riotings, all these things are the manifestations of darkness, and they are the things upon which the extreme judgment of God will be executed when the day will arrive when the full light will come utterly inconsistent. It is for those who are the people of God to have any business with that which is the characteristic upon which the judgment of God will be executed in its greatest extremity and without any amelioration on the day of his judgment will arrive.

There is the exhortation, my friends, that is brought to bear upon us, and let us take it to heart that night is far spent and day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness. Let us manifest ourselves to be the children of light and the children of the day, the children who will be manifested in that great salvation which Christ will bestow upon his own Church and upon his own people.

He will come again the second time without sin unto salvation. Let us pray. O ever-blessed and eternal God, we pray Thee that Thou wouldst quicken us to a realization of the great issues that devolve upon us and with which we are confronted as we are hastening on to that judgment seat where Christ will manifest Himself in His glory and where He will bestow upon His people according to His grace and minister unto all His enemies that judgment that is equitable and do Thou grant unto us that we may take heed unto those things which are ours now so that we may awake out of sleep and that we may cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light and all for Jesus' sake and in His name.

Amen.

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